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ABSTRACT

Picture books provide effective models for student writing. For purposes of organization and writing lessons, the models found in picture books may be divided into three groups: (1) language patterns; (2) story structures; and (3) literary elements. Language patterns include repetitive sentence patterns, verse forms, word patterns, and cultural sequences (concepts such as the alphabet, numbers, or the days of the week). Story structures instill in young writers an organization for their thinking. Some story structures even primary children can emulate are cumulative tales, problem centered sequences, explanation-direction sequences, episodic patterns, chronological structures, and interlocking sequences. Literary elements--plot, character, setting, theme, and tone--can be approached through textless picture books. Because picture books rely upon a multitude of these patterns and structures, the more forms the students recognize and utilize from a single picture book, the more diverse their writing will become. (JL)

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MODELING AUTHORS TO BECOME AUTHORS

Valerie Sheppard

Six-year-old Susie was dictating a story to her teacher. "The Daddy Hippo said, 'Someone took a bite out of my T.V. dinner.' The Mommy Hippo said, 'Someone took a bite out of my T.V. dinner.' The Baby Hippo said, 'Someone took a bite out of my T.V. dinner, then she ate it all up.'" Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Susie was instinctively modeling her story on Goldilocks and The Three Bears.

Most writers consciously or unconsciously pattern their writing on what they have read. As James Moffett (1968) observes, inventing or making up stories is difficult, so children often recombine familiar stories in new ways to create their own.

Results of research in the area of writing support a structured literature approach to writing. When literature functions as the prewriting phase of the writing process, an established framework promotes better writing. Similarly structured procedures are recommended by Lundsteen (1976), Stewig (1980), and Jett-

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Simpson (1981). All recommend sharing literature in the discovery stage of prewriting as a stimulus for creative thinking, then writing.

The steps a teacher may wish to follow when using literature as a model for writing are:

1. Presentation of the selection
2. Recognition of pattern or structure to be modeled
3. Discussion of ways to use pattern in individual writing (More than one pattern might be noted in the selection, at this time, allowing for options in writing.)
4. Participation in writing exercise using a technique discussed
5. Revision of the writing
6. Sharing writing through publication and/or oral presentation

As language arts teachers, we should keep in mind that writing need not always follow the reading of literature. Many other writing opportunities ought to exist in the classroom. Also, literature to be read for sheer enjoyment is every bit as necessary as literature used as a writing or learning experience.

Although literature of any form may be incorporated into a literature-based writing program, the use of picture books is highly advantageous. Couglin and Desilets (1980) observed picture books to be effective, in a modeling situation, even at the high school level. Literary patterns to model are plentiful in picture books. Most of the books have more than one pattern to draw from and the patterns are obvious, thanks to a simplicity of writing natural to the genre. Because picture books are simple in appearance, modeling the writing is not threatening, recognizing the structure is quick, and reading time is minimal, allowing more class time for actual writing.

The models available in picture books are almost as varied as the literature itself; however, for purposes of organization and writing lessons, the models may be grouped into language patterns, story structures, and literary elements.

LANGUAGE PATTERNS

There are very few primary teachers who have not taken advantage of the repetition of sentence patterns in Bill Martin's Instant Readers, especially Brown Bear, Brown Bear. The predictable language is often chanted, then changed only slightly into a new story in many classrooms. "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? I see a redbird looking at me." became "Wild beasty, wild beasty, what do you see? I see a frightened child looking at me." in one classroom. Repetitive sentence patterns are excellent tools to use with beginning writers and conspicuous in many picture books. Some popular ones include The Important Book by Margaret Wise Brown, I Can't Said The Ant by Polly Cameron, Do You Know What I'll Do by Charlotte Zolotow, and Round Is A Pancake by Joan Sullivan.

Besides repetitive sentences, language patterns may be observed in verse forms, word patterns, and cultural sequences. Whole books have been devoted to verse forms, such as haikus, cinquains, limericks, and couplets, which children may emulate in creative writing lessons. A picture story book which offers a good example of the couplet is Drummer Hoff. This Caldecott book by Barbara and Ed Emberly is cumulative as well. "Major Scott brought the shot, Captain Bammer brought the rammer, Sergeant Chowder brought the powder, Corporal Farrell brought the barrel, Private Parriage brought the carriage, but Drummer Hoff fired it off." This colorful book ends with a "KAHBAHBLOOOM." For older children, who enjoy

humorous verses, Wallace Tripp demonstrates parodies based on familiar verses in the collection of rhymes, Granfa' Grigg Had A Pig.

Exposure to word patterns in picture books stimulates interest in language play. Picture books abound in word patterns, such as homonyms, codes, word classifications, idioms, imaginary words and onomatopoeia. After students figure out, "R U C-P? S, I M. I M 2." from William Steig's C D B, they may write their own stories in code. Students may want to write etymologies after studying James Cox's Put Your Foot In Your Mouth which contains some plausible explanations for the origins of many familiar, and not so familiar, idiomatic expressions. Children may also develop entire stories around imaginary words after giggling over Jack Prelutsky's verses written around imaginary words like, "snopp", "gibble", "wozzit", and "flakker" in The Snopp On The Sidewalk.

Cultural sequences exist in concepts common to a society. The alphabet, numbers, days of the week, time, months, and seasons are just a few cultural sequences evident in picture books. The range of writing for students in this area may be as different as Musgrove's Ashanti To Zulu: African Traditions is to Feeling's Moja Means One (A Swahili Counting Book). A combination of the evolution of a butterfly with days of the week and numbers are cleverly interwoven in a story line and delightfully presented in Eric Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar. The caterpillar eats one apple on Monday, two pears on Tuesday...and so on as the pages literally grow with the caterpillar's appetite until Sunday, when the fat caterpillar builds a cocoon. Two weeks later a beautiful

butterfly emerges. Eric Carle combines another set of cultural sequences in his book The Grouchy Lady Bug.

STORY STRUCTURES

Story structures instill in young writers an organization for their thinking. From first grade on, writing teachers point out the necessity of a beginning, middle, and end for unity in a good story. Yet, along with the three part story, a focus on the variety of story structures in literature may reward students with new directions and added clarity to their own stories. Some story structures which even primary children can easily emulate are cumulative tales, problem-centered sequences, expanation-direction sequences, episodic patterns, chronological structures, and interlocking sequences.

Cumulative tales abound in picture books, such as This Is The House That Jack Built, If All The Seas Were One Sea, and The Pancake. A more subtle cumulative tale may extend imaginations. A good example is It Could Always Be Worse by Margot Zemach. In the beginning of the story there is already an accumulation of people in a tiny, village hut, causing a problem as well. The rabbi recommends adding the chickens, a rooster, goose, goat, and finally a cow to the overcrowded hut. It is not until the rabbi suggests, "Go home now, my poor unfortunate man, and let the animals out of your hut." that the problem and accumulation is resolved.

The explanations or directions in some non-fiction picture books are excellent sources to pattern as well as sources of information. Tomie dePaola's books in this category offer subdued stories along with structured procedures in the processing of cloth (Charlie

Needs a Cloak), information about quicksand (The Quicksand Book), or directions for making popcorn (The Popcorn Book). In Charlie Needs a Cloak, students will learn about washing, carding, spinning, and dying wool before it is woven into cloth. They also witness activities of a mouse and sheep through the changing seasons.

Problem-centered picture books are easy to locate, as most strong plots present conflict. Gertrude The Goose Who Forgot by Paul and Joanna Galdone depicts a problem in verse format; while, The Treasure by Uri Shulevitz resolves a problem through a journey. format. In both books, students will recognize the presentation of a problem with the introduction of characters and setting. The main characters go to others for help as the plots build to interesting solutions.

In the episodic pattern, the incidents together represent a story. The episodes may be put together through financial transactions, as in Judith Viorst's Alexander Who Used To Be Rich Last Sunday. Alexander starts with a dollar on Sunday, but after buying gum, betting with Anthony, renting a friend's snake, loosing his temper, etc., Anthony winds up with only a few odds and ends and bus tokens. Episodes may also be connect through questions as in Whose Mouse are You? and May I Bring A Friend? Many episodic patterns with unusual joining techniques are available in picture books.

The chronological structure is similar to the episodic pattern, though the story is moved through time-ordering rather than a series of events. Time may be measured in a number of ways, from the changing seasons in Fredrick by Leo Lionni to stages in a life time in The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein. Students may use a number of time line devices in sequencing their stories after sharing

these books.

One of the finest interlocking structures found in picture books is the adapted and illustrated Japanese folktale, The Stonecutter, by Gerald McDermott. The stonecutter first envies the prince and wishes to be like him. Once he is granted his wish, he longs for the sun's power. After becoming the sun, he wishes to be a cloud, then finally the mountain. This interlocking tale becomes circular in the end, when another stonecutter chips away at the powerful mountain. Other effective interlocking structures may be noted in Anthony Browne's Bear Hunt and Margot Zemach's Hush Little Baby.

LITERARY ELEMENTS

Literary elements, including plot, character, setting, theme, and tone, are the very essence of a story. As students develop skills in analyzing, critiquing, or writing stories, emphasis is placed, in varying degrees, on these elements. In writing stories, all of the components are essential; yet, it is more helpful to students if the elements are considered independently.

The action of a story becomes complex as teachers attempt to increase students' understandings of climax, resolution, introduction, and complication. A good starting point can be with a textless picture book. Textless books allow students a better understanding of the complexities of plot while gaining practice in writing action. Of course, as students explain the action, they nearly always include dialogue, which can be a difficult skill to teach. Many entertaining textless books are available, although Mercer Mayer's books surface to the top of any list.

Look for Hiccup, Frog Goes To Dinner, and A Boy, A Dog, and a Frog.

Almost any picture book could be mentioned when suggesting writing assignments based on characterization. Unusual personalities provide interest and develop conflict. Amelia Bedelia, a literal-minded maid, shortens the dresses in a shop with scissors rather than needle and thread in Come Back, Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish. Fredrick, in Fredrick by Leo Lionni, does not help the other mice gather food for winter, but spends his time collecting sun rays, colors and words. "Oh, no, I am gathering words. For the winter days are long and many, and we'll run out of things to say." Also, interaction between characters develops the action. Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad Are Friends and James Marshall's George and Martha Encore present stories through character interaction and each book is just part of a series of books about the same characters. Students may dream up other adventures for the characters or add characters to complicate the conflicts.

Settings may or may not have an eminent position in a story. In Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown, the setting is described in loving detail. "In the great green room there was a telephone and a red balloon and a picture of..." The tucked-in rabbit says "good-night" to each and every detail. Without the setting, there would be no story. The setting has a great impact on action in Steven Kellogg's The Island of the Skog and Mercer Mayer's There's A Nightmare In My Closet. Changing the setting in these stories will alter events and characters as well.

The mere mention of a title, like Cameron's If Mice Could Fly or Giff's Today Was a Terrible Day may set student's pens flying. Stories may be written based on titles before or after the books

are shared. Sometimes the theme is not stated outright in the title, but given through the moral of a fable. Students may write a new fable for the moral, "When the need is strong, there are those who will believe anything." (p.16) This moral, from Arnold Lobel's Fables, applies to a young bear who willingly changes clothes at the crow's suggestion in order to wear proper attire. "He put a frying pan on his head. He wrapped himself in a bed sheet. He stuffed his feet into large paper bags and rushed off toward the town." (p. 16) Lobel has made up some new morals and fables to go with them, which is something students may wish to do after sharing the delightful book, Fables.

Oh Were They Ever Happy by Peter Spier establishes a tone from the children's point of view. After the parents remark on the much needed paint job for their house, then leave, the children go into action using every paint can around. The ensuing disaster only inspires the children's delight over pleasing their parents. "Sure looks swell! Won't they be happy when they come home and see what we've done!" The book ends in a splash of colors covering the house, empty paint cans stacked by the driveway, a bunch of onlookers and "Oh, were they ever happy!" The tone may change dramatically if students were to write the story from the parent's point of view.

All of the books suggested may be listed in more than one category, as both books and categories mesh. Most picture books rely on a multitude of patterns and structures. The more forms students recognize, then utilize from a single picture book, the more diverse their writing will become. In the end, stories in print provide merely a direction for young writers' dreams. Teachers with a vast array of picture books, enthusiastic over books and writing, and following a few simple steps, will develop literature from literature as their students model authors to become authors.

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